

Contributions to bat conservation by Ku-ring-gai Bat Colony Committee Inc.

Nancy Pallin

Ku-ring-gai Bat Colony Committee Inc., 45 Highfield Road, Lindfield 2070

History of Sydney's Flying-fox Colony

In 1983 the Grey-headed Flying-fox colony at Gordon, Sydney became the centre of public argument. The subdivision of land used by the bats was discovered by local conservationists who voiced their objections to the alienation of wildlife habitat. Scientists supported the conservationists and succeeded in convincing the Heritage Council of the importance of the site. An interim Conservation Order was placed on the land while Andrew McWilliam, B.Sc., Ph.D. completed a report on the colony for the National Parks and Wildlife Service. This emphasized the colony's importance for the Grey-headed Flying-fox population in the southern half of New South Wales. Subsequently, the land was purchased jointly by the New South Wales Government and Ku-ring-gai Municipal Council.

The purchase caused an uproar in the press as the uninformed objected to "money being wasted on bats". To support the Council's decision, the then Mayor, Ron Yeates invited conservation groups and individuals to a meeting at which the Ku-ring-gai Bat Colony Committee was formed (February 1985). It is a community organization which subsequently became an incorporated association.

Protection

At that time flying-fox species were not protected in New South Wales and had been recently removed from the protected list in Queensland. The New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service had already prepared legislation for protection but needed the public support created by the drama over the colony at Gordon to put this through parliament. Dr Merlin Tuttle, Director of Bat Conservation International Inc. U.S.A. and Dr Dedee Woodside met the Minister for the Environment, Mr Bob Carr to explain the importance of these animals in forest ecology. Early in 1986 all flying-foxes became protected in New South Wales. Licence to shoot them in orchards had to be obtained from NPWS offices.

Education

A children's story "A Bat Came to Stay" by ten year old Catherine Pallin with illustrations by Martyn Robinson was widely publicized by the media and provided

our first, easy to read information on the Grey-headed Flying-fox. The proceeds of its sale were given to the Committee.

We commenced a public education programme armed with a hand-reared flying-fox at the St Ives Show and later in shopping centres, on radio, and on daytime television. Actual physical contact with a bat is the most effective means of changing a person's attitude. The Committee's public education programme has depended on the availability of hand-reared and unreleasable Grey-headed Flying-foxes, formerly cared for by Helen George and now by the Committee.

Now "Bat talks" including colour transparencies of Grey-headed Flying-foxes have been given to hundreds of schools and community groups such as scouts, guides, church groups and conservation organizations. The Committee charges a fee of \$2 per person (minimum charge \$50).

The New South Wales Department of Education has approved our "performance" for science education in schools. By explaining pollination and seed dispersal roles of flying-foxes in forest ecology the public can accept that these bats deserve a place in the world.

"Friends of Bats" newsletter

It is essential that the general public has access to scientific information on which bat conservation is based. The "Friends of Bats" newsletter is published quarterly; annual subscription \$10; currently about 350 subscribers.

In March and October each year the Committee arranges a "bat" evening at Gordon for subscribers and friends. This includes a visit to the edge of the Ku-ring-gai Flying-fox Reserve, observation of the exodus of flying-foxes from their valley at dusk, guest speakers and an opportunity to meet bats. Speakers have included Dedee Woodside, Helen George, Chris Tidemann, Peggy Eby, Ray Williams, Linda Collins, Julie Spence and Nancy Pallin. The last two "bat evenings" attracted over 200 people each time.

In conjunction with the local resources centre of the Ku-ring-gai Municipal Library a bibliography of the Grey-headed Flying-fox was published in 1987 (\$2) and photocopies of most of the scientific papers listed are

now housed in the library in Gordon. A number of students chose projects on the flying-foxes as part of the curricula for the Higher School Certificate.

Hand Rearing, Banding and Release

Many Sydney people have come to appreciate flying-foxes through hand-rearing of orphans. The K.B.C.C. Inc. is now responsible for the co-ordination of hand rearing, banding and release of Grey-headed Flying-foxes into the colony in Sydney. Data and reports are prepared for the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme and for the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service. The Wildlife Information and Rescue Service and other voluntary animal care organizations assist with this programme. The good condition of the few banded animals found electrocuted, indicates that they are coping satisfactorily in the wild. We hope to accumulate information on longevity and movements, in spite of the small numbers banded. 1987-88, 19 released; 1988-89, 79 released; 1989-90, 63 released.

Habitat Restoration Project

The steep bushland valley surrounded by houses where the Grey-headed Flying-foxes camp, has been named Ku-ring-gai Flying-fox Reserve by Ku-ring-gai Municipal Council. The Council is preparing a draft plan of management for this Reserve, the main objective being to protect the flying-fox habitat.

The Committee is managing the Habitat Restoration Project which aims to remove the severe weed infestation and replace it with a self-perpetuating community of native plants including canopy trees suitable for flying-fox roosting. From 1987-90 a professional bush regeneration team has been employed with funds provided by the New South Wales Heritage Conservation Fund, Ku-ring-gai Municipal Council and public donations. The Council funding has been threatened each year by four Aldermen who believe these bats are only destroyers of commercial fruit and are of no other use. The Committee is very grateful to Mike Augée for his support in writing to the Mayor and speaking at meetings.

The project is also dependent on the labour of an enthusiastic volunteer team who work each Tuesday to rescue the forest.

Already Turpentine *Syncarpia glomulifera* seedlings have naturally regenerated as well as the native grasses, herbs and shrubs. Sandpaper Figs *Ficus coronata* presumably carried by the flying-foxes are growing vigorously in the weed free areas but are not apparent in the untreated areas. Tree and shrub species are also being planted to speed up the restoration of the habitat.

An initial terrestrial mammal survey by Ray and Anne Williams discovered plenty of Black Rats *Rattus rattus* and two *Antechinus stuartii* in the valley. In winter and summer the Committee is mapping the distribution of flying-foxes in the valley. A local boy admitted to catching and eating 20 yabbies.

By the end of 1990 about 1.5 hectares, the most severely degraded area, will have been regenerated only leaving another five or so to go. We know this is a long term project and trust that by treating the valley section by section the flying-fox habitat will be released from the strangle of weeds.

Microchiroptera

As so few people see microchiropterans they are fascinated by their small size and their echo-location abilities. Our opportunities to show these tiny mammals to the public have been few, as they are so small and vulnerable. Through the Wildlife Information and Rescue Service (WIRES) several unreleasable microchiroptera are being cared for in Sydney and we hope to include them in our education programme when possible.

Assistance Invited

Assistance on an occasional basis with any aspects of the Committee's work is always welcome. We need advice from scientists, news of research progress and illustrations for the newsletter, speakers for bat nights etc. We know all this effort is having a positive effect on public perceptions about bats in Sydney and hope it will continue to spread.

Mammal Section Talks

Society Rooms, Education Centre,
Taronga Zoo

Tuesday, August 28, 1990
then

Tuesday, September 25, 1990

Contact Christine Hopkins or Murray Ellis.
See inside front cover for phone numbers
and further information.